

Branton Community First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122188
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	292334
Inspection date	25 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Linda Buller

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	17
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Laura Capper
Headteacher	Mrs Alison Lloyd-Harris
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2003
School address	Branton Powburn Alnwick Northumberland NE66 4JF
Telephone number	01665 578225
Fax number	01665 578225

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This very small rural school serves an area with recognised pockets of rural disadvantage although the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below the national average. All pupils are White British. Very few pupils come from the immediate village with several travelling long distances to attend the school. There are no children who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of children with learning difficulties is well above the national average. All children work in mixed age classes. Due to the very small number of children who begin school each year, attainment on entry varies from below average to above average. There are currently no pupils in Year 1. The school is subject to local proposals for schools' reorganisation.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with outstanding features in its provision for supporting and caring for pupils, including excellent provision for their pastoral care. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is outstanding. They gain a mature and self-motivated approach to learning as they move through the school. Their behaviour is excellent and they feel safe and secure at all times. They enjoy great relationships with each other and staff; this creates an atmosphere of mutual respect. Pupils contribute enthusiastically to school life. This enthusiasm extends to their concern for the local environment and fund raising projects for a number of international causes.

Pupils reach standards which are above average and they achieve well. From a wide variety of starting points when they begin school children make good progress in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. As a result, despite the small numbers of children involved and differences in the cohort size each year, standards in the national tests at the age of seven have been consistently above and often well above the national average. Good progress continues in Key Stage 2 so that by the time pupils leave the school at the end of Year 4 many are already working at the level expected of eleven year olds. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities also make good progress due to the exceptional quality of the support which they receive from both staff and fellow pupils.

Teaching is good. Learning is effective because teachers take great care in their planning to make learning relevant and fun. Through its good curriculum provision, which includes a good range of enrichment activities, the school is very successful in broadening pupils' knowledge and experiences. The school does well in adapting the curriculum to address the needs of different groups of pupils. However, this is occasionally less successful for children in the Foundation Stage. Provision for pupils' personal development is outstanding; consequently they are developing the skills needed to help them as adults and are very aware of how to be fit and healthy through exercise and diet.

Good leadership and management give a high priority to making sure pupils are confident, happy and, whatever their ability, are included in all the school has to offer. The school uses self-evaluation well to recognise strengths and weaknesses and to identify the correct priorities to raise standards even further. Opportunities for formal monitoring and evaluation of the school's provision are, however, infrequent; therefore, the impact of new initiatives is not always measured quickly or rigorously enough. Nevertheless high standards have been maintained since the last inspection and clear plans for development demonstrate that the school's capacity to improve further is good and that it provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the curriculum for the Foundation Stage consistently meets the needs of all children.
- Ensure that new initiatives and changes to the school provision are regularly monitored and evaluated.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well and standards are above average. Due to the very small numbers of pupils in each year group, it is difficult to draw conclusions on patterns in standards from national tests and assessments at the end of the Foundation Stage... However, from their wide range of starting points children in the Foundation Stage make good progress and enter Year 1 well on track towards reaching above average standards by the time they are seven. During Years 1 to 4, progress continues to be good because teaching systematically builds pupils' basic skills and ensures they are very well supported in their learning. This results in consistently above average and often well above average standards attained at the end of Key Stage 1. Similarly, many pupils are already working at the expected level for 11 year olds when they leave the school at the age of nine. There is no significant difference in the achievement of girls and boys.

Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress against the targets set for their learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of pupils are outstanding, as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The exceptional quality of relationships pervades the school and includes all. As a result pupils feel very much part of the school family and learn to be very well behaved. They love school and their enjoyment of learning is excellent. Pupils tackle challenges with enthusiasm and are confident that they will be helped to succeed. Progress in their personal development is often exceptional both in the Foundation Stage and throughout the school due to the excellent support they receive from teachers and teaching assistants. Pupils know that their views are listened to and acted upon; consequently they have a clear sense of their role in supporting the school and wider community. Attendance is satisfactory but, due to the small number of pupils at the school, it varies considerably year-on-year as every absence can have a significant impact on the overall picture. Many pupils travel considerable distances to attend school and this does, at times, due to weather conditions, have a negative impact on attendance.

Pupils have a highly developed appreciation of the world around them and their local culture, although their understanding of cultures different from their own is less well developed. They take their responsibilities to maintain and protect the environment very seriously. Pupils are rightly proud of the many awards they have helped the school to achieve. All pupils feel safe and valued in school, younger children are very well cared for and supported by older pupils whose mature attitudes they admire and imitate. Pupils are vigilant about healthy eating and taking exercise; for example all pupils take advantage of the provision of a very healthy school lunch. They have good levels of literacy and numeracy and show high levels of cooperation. These skills equip them well for the next stage of education and support their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers' excellent relationships with the pupils help them to manage and organise learning well. Teachers explain new work clearly and involve the pupils effectively. They make good reference to pupils' learning targets, although this is more effective in the teaching of the older pupils. Pupils tackle tasks with vigour and enthusiasm and are eager to learn because they find the teaching interesting and fun. They particularly enjoy practical activities and develop good independent learning skills. The majority of lessons are planned well, with teachers' good knowledge of the ability of each pupil in their class being used effectively to ensure they make good progress. Occasionally, planning for the Foundation Stage is insufficiently detailed. It is not explicit enough about the learning that is expected for the range of abilities in the class. As a result, at these times the progress of some children is satisfactory rather than good.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Curriculum provision is good. Great care is taken to promote enjoyment of learning and to make tasks relevant to pupils in this school. The personal, social and health education programme is highly effective and provides pupils with a very good understanding of how to be safe, healthy and to be responsible citizens. The curriculum is extended effectively and innovatively through specialist teaching and coaching and through visits to places of interest. Pupils say this helps them to learn and they are very excited about their forthcoming residential visit which is a new experience for many. Staff work hard in adapting the curriculum year-on-year to reflect the changes in both the number and ability of pupils in each year group. Currently this is more successful in Years 2 to 4 than in the Foundation Stage. Although the curriculum is planned to cover the areas of learning within the Foundation Stage, occasionally the balance between activities that are led by staff with those that encourage children to explore for themselves do not meet the wide variety of needs in this class.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support for its pupils. Pastoral care is excellent. Procedures for ensuring that pupils are safe are in place and meet national guidelines. The school ensures that, where necessary, support and guidance is drawn from a broad range of health and education professionals. The staff's detailed knowledge of pupils' academic and personal needs leads to high quality support and an atmosphere in which pupils thrive. This is particularly effective for those pupils who have difficulties with their learning or behaviour. The outstanding support, guidance and understanding they receive from all staff and other pupils means they are fully included in all the school has to offer and make good and often exceptional progress against those targets set for them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The school's good leadership and management are characterised by shared values and a clear vision for further improvement. The head teacher's purposeful leadership has enabled the school to maintain consistently good standards since the last inspection. This has been achieved by good and, at times, outstanding provision despite a climate of uncertainty regarding significant reorganisation proposals and the need to change and adapt provision year on year to reflect the different needs of each cohort of pupils. Through effective evaluation of test results and teachers' own assessments of how well their pupils are doing, the school has an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses and uses the information well to plan for future development. Teachers share good practice and discuss teaching and learning in an atmosphere of mutual support; however, opportunities for formal monitoring and evaluation of the school's work are limited. As a result, the impact of changes made in response to the different needs and numbers of pupils in each cohort or the introduction of new initiatives are not always measured rigorously enough; for example to quickly identify whether or not the curriculum is fully meeting the needs of all pupils. Governance is good; a committed team of governors, confidently led by the chair of governors, provide good support and challenge.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

27 April 2007

Inspection of Branton Community First School, Alnwick, NE66 4JF

Dear Pupils

I really enjoyed the day I spent at your school. You made me feel very welcome because you were very friendly, polite and helpful. When we chatted you gave me a clear view of your school and why you like it so much.

Teaching is good and your teachers make you work hard, but make sure that your lessons are enjoyable and that you find them interesting and fun. The way you behave and care for each other is outstanding. The school has a good variety of activities, trips and visitors which you really enjoy and help you learn. The school takes excellent care of you. You all feel very safe, you eat healthily and take part in physical activities.

To make your school even better I have asked your head teacher and governors to keep a careful check on how well you are doing after they have made changes to what you are taught or how your classes are arranged. I have also asked them to make sure that the youngest children always have tasks that help them to learn as well as they can.

You too can help to make your school even better by making sure you attend regularly and continue to do your best.

Best wishes

Linda Buller

Lead inspector